



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Montana 2022



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2021 Final
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$574,577
Forest Legacy	\$10,145,000
Forest Stewardship	\$178,685
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$300,000
State Fire Assistance	\$3,281,523
Urban and Community Forestry	\$369,947
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$470,399
Total	\$15,320,131

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

The mission of the Forestry Division of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is to ensure sustainability of Montana forests, rural lands and communities through cooperative wildland fire protection, sound forest management practices and by promoting a viable forest-based economy.

Cooperative Forestry and Wildland Fire programs are integral to fulfilling this mission. The programs provide critical assistance to Montana landowners, communities, forest-based industries and others. These programs are administered and implemented through partnerships between DNRC, USDA Forest Service (USFS) and other private, non-profit and government entities to create resilient forests, and build sustainable economies and vibrant communities.

Program Goals

- Use the Montana Forest Action Plan to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk to communities, while increasing the pace and scale of coordinated landscape level forest management in Montana. <https://www.montanaforestactionplan.org/>
To accelerate this effort the State of Montana appropriated \$4.5 million above base funding and the Forest Service contributed \$500,000 in Shared Stewardship funds for implementation of projects within the priority areas.
- Increase acres treated for fuels reduction and forest health on private and federal lands through partnerships with the Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, American Forest Foundation, Farm Service Agency, American Forests and Montana communities.
- Guide forest owners, managers and communities in stewardship objectives and promote the benefits of engaged active forest management. Increase the ability of landowners, natural resource managers and communities to meet management objectives by providing financial, technical and logistical support.
- Promote responsible, active forest management that ensures ecological conditions meet the needs of future generations for clean water, wildlife habitat, sustainable timber supply and recreation opportunities.
- Actively promote stewardship of Montana's urban and community forests.
- Promote Montana wood products, support the development of wood energy infrastructure and encourage the production of new and innovative wood products applications. Retain and bolster Montana's forest industry so that forests can be managed in an ecologically and economically practical manner.
- Assist state, private and other non-federal resource managers in identifying and managing forest insects and diseases. Participate in interagency efforts to prevent and manage non-native invasive

forest pests in Montana.

- Provide a well-rounded fire protection program incorporating, as critical components, safe and effective fire response; training, professional development and organizational learning; community preparedness, homeowner risk reduction and fire prevention; as well as prescribed fire and hazardous fuels reduction.
- Modernize the State/County Coop (County Coop) Fire Protection arrangement to include needed legislation, resources required to achieve program guidance and performance objectives reflecting strategic direction and priorities.
- Convene an internal collaborative effort to both craft the direction on implementing the National Cohesive Fire Management Strategy and coordinate the activities of Fire Protection, Forestry Assistance and Trust Lands Management programs to achieve mutually beneficial goals, focusing on internal cohesion.
- Complete workforce analysis and plan for workforce configuration at unit, land office, and bureau levels, with eye toward enabling capacity to necessarily align the scope of the program with the strategic vision. Develop a recruitment and retention strategy aligned with improved HR policies (temporary details, position/pay matrix, etc.) supporting the workforce development objectives of this goal.
- Understand and have defined our wildland fire information technology (WFIT) business needs and have identified how to meet those business needs in a timely and cost-effective manner. Enable us to have adequate data capture, storage and analysis systems that inform financial, strategic and programmatic decision making.
- Complete aviation strategy that includes a plan for transitioning from our current aircraft to our next generation aircraft over time and have begun the process of preparing the Legislature for the necessary future capital expenditures to make that transition.
- Control 95% of the fires occurring on DNRC direct protection at 10 acres or less because as fires grow larger, firefighting costs rise exponentially.
- Maintain stable, adequate purchasing power in the Fire Protection Program preparedness budget and a stable fire suppression account that enables our ability to sustain our program delivery.

Key Issues

- Our agency is working to educate Montana landowners, homeowners and the public about the concepts and benefits of fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes. We are using the newly released Forest Action Plan as one of our main platforms to communicate these concepts and convince people to make the investments necessary to create fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes.
- The environment in which the DNRC Fire Protection program operates has shifted dramatically. Fire seasons are longer, fire conditions have become more severe, fires are getting larger, and "big" fire seasons occur more frequently. Forest conditions are out of balance in forest types that cover large areas of Montana where fire is no longer playing its natural role.
- The State County Cooperative Fire (County Coop) Program is enormously important to our success and provides an estimated annual economic value of \$45 million to Montana taxpayers (vs. providing direct protection on 45 million acres of NFZ land). However, not only is the County Coop Program based on a 50-year-old model that no longer reflects operating realities, it faces significant challenges, including a severely declining volunteer workforce and evolving expectations of what the DNRC can do.
- More than 85% of our partnering local government fire departments are staffed solely by volunteer firefighters. Like fire departments across the nation, the fire services in Montana struggle to recruit and retain volunteers. Consequently, many volunteer fire departments in the state have much smaller memberships than they've had in the past and the average age of the members they do have is growing. In addition, volunteer firefighters are not as available as they used to be.
- Many small communities in Montana struggle with the capacity to manage their community forests, even with DNRC assistance. The inevitable detection of the Emerald Ash Borer will compound this problem.
- Educating the public about best management practices for tree care continues to be a challenge. For example, tree topping is still a common issue.

- It is difficult to convince potential users that the upfront cost of wood energy installations is worth the effort when compared to fossil fuels. Not having funding to cover construction compounds this problem.
- Small, stagnant and /or shrinking budgets make it difficult to maintain adequate personnel to manage programs.
- In addition to increasingly severe fire conditions, Montana has a wildland-urban interface (WUI) problem that demands more fire protection resources, mitigation services and assistance in community preparedness. Over the past 17 years, the number of homes in high wildfire hazard areas in Montana nearly doubled. Increasing human habitation at the WUI requires more fire prevention, mitigation, community preparedness and fire suppression resources to enable the DNRC to redeem its responsibilities.
- DNRC has identified a need to emphasize fire investigation and billing.
- Over time, repeated budget reductions and rising operating costs have eroded the purchasing power of the Fire and Aviation Management Program budget, and a continuation of these trends will challenge the fiscal sustainability of our current approach to program delivery.
- Taking an interagency approach improves efficiency, enables more cost-effective services to Montana taxpayers and strengthens the overall effectiveness of Montana's wildland fire service. However, interagency coordination and cooperation also requires staffing for interagency dispatch and coordination centers, inter-operable radio communication, equipment and training that meet interagency standards and other fire protection preparedness costs that make interagency operations possible.
- We need to develop our workforce of the future today to assure that we have a motivated, productive and engaged workforce, guided by well-prepared leaders. However, we face challenges when it comes to recruiting, developing and retaining the workforce the DNRC will need to remain effective in the future.
- The DNRC's need for accurate data and information resources needs are large, complex and critical to our success. Currently, the DNRC Fire program lacks adequate data capture systems to reliably inform either strategic or programmatic decision making.
- Idaho Forest Group closed its sawmill in St. Regis MT. This closure, along with RY Timber's closure of its sawmill in Townsend last year, will result in a smaller market and higher transportation costs for public and private timber, especially when lumber prices decline.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2021 Accomplishments	Value
Population	989,415	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	1,260
Acres of Forest Land	25,779,495	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	2,163
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	5,430,000	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	1,163
Number of NIPF Landowners	40,000	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	322
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	1,698,462	State Fire Communities Assisted	113
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	2,658,952	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	1,750
Number of Rural Fire Departments	385	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	7,256
Cities and Towns	127	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	46
Forest Based Employment	6,530	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	469,431
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	3,942
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	14,422,960		

Program Highlights

Community Forestry and Open Space

DNRC did not have any applications for the Community Forestry and Open Space program this year, but do expect to have one for next year.

Conservation Education

After a year off due to Covid-19 impacts, Conservation Education funding supported delivery of the annual Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp. 2021 saw the attendance of 20 campers ages 13-17. The camp serves to provide a unique learning opportunity for tomorrow's potential natural resource workforce through an introduction to natural resource systems and the concepts of conservation. Campers experience strength of character and personal growth while immersed in natural resource education and experiences. Additionally, Conservation Education funding supported "walk in the woods" field trips during Montana Forest Products Week with students from the towns of Seeley Lake, Anaconda, and Deer Lodge where they spent a day learning about forest ecology and the forest products industry. Additional engagement during Forest Products Week provided an inside perspective for the public to learn about how wood products are manufactured and the renewable resources that sustain them. Conservation Education funding is supporting youth natural resource education and the equipping of youth educators through an award to National Wildlife Federation. This partnership supports engagement through the Project WET (Water Education for Teachers), Project Learning Tree, and the Montana Environmental Education Association.

Cooperative Fire Protection

Montana's Rural Fire Capacity Grant program provided \$435,913 in the fiscal year of 2021. These funds will be used to organize, train and equip firefighters to prevent and suppress wildfires. Rural fire departments represent the first line of defense in coping with wildfires and other emergencies in rural areas and rural communities throughout the entire calendar year. These departments are charged with the protection of lives, homes, and business investments.

Our National Fire Capacity (NFC) funds support the Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network. Its mission is to connect and support people and communities who are striving to live more safely with wildfire. The Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network works collaboratively to develop new ideas, connect people and share strategies across Montana to support fire adapted communities. NFC also supports the Keep Montana Green program and other efforts directed toward fire prevention.

The Western States WUI Grant Program supports the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy by focusing on protecting communities within the WUI through outcome-driven, cross-boundary, innovative projects that align with priority areas identified in the Forest Action Plan and Montana Wildfire Risk Assessment. Treatment was completed on 2,091 acres of non-federal land. The program also supports Fire Adapted Community Coordinators to raise awareness, educate and encourage Montanans to take action to manage their risk, as well as update Community Wildfire Protection Plans that are 10+ years old.

The Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program minimizes the potential for catastrophic losses to private property as the result of a wildland fire encroaching from adjacent public lands, which is accomplished through cost-share programs directly administered by DNRC personnel and in partnership with conservation organizations. The program treated 597 acres of non-federal land.

Economic Action

The grant funds that DNRC awards from USDA State and Private Forestry and state of Montana sources not only help manage portions of the landscape that would not be feasible otherwise, these funds also help to maintain Montana's forest products and logging infrastructure. Maintaining this infrastructure significantly reduces the cost of forest management in the state because wood products of all types can be sold to offset costs. Despite the loss of some milling infrastructure, Montana's remaining mills are making investments in technology and increasing their production providing a functional and integrated industry across most of the state. Last year the forest products industry in Montana employed 6973 people and contributed \$869 million to the state's economy.

Forest Health Protection

The Forest Pest Management Program continued to provide identification, surveillance and management of forest pests on State, municipal, county and private lands throughout the state. Professional foresters, fire personnel and tree care specialists were trained to identify and appropriately manage forest insects and diseases. Trainings and presentations were conducted in-person and virtually. Pheromone-baited traps were set to detect *Lymantria dispar*. Western Bark Beetle Initiative funds were sub-awarded to non-federal land management entities to treat stands to reduce susceptibility to bark beetles.

Forest Legacy

Montana's Forest Legacy Program is administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in consultation with the Montana Forest Action Committee (and formerly by the Montana Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee), which serves in an advisory role to recommend projects for submission and to provide feedback on applications. In 2021, the 27,289-acre Kootenai Forestlands Phase II Conservation Easement Project and the 772-acre Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area acquisition were completed using Forest Legacy and partner funds as well as value contributed by the landowners. These projects conserve critically important fish and wildlife habitat from residential development, provide continued recreational access and will be actively managed as working forests to provide critical timber supply to northwest Montana's mills and forest industry workers. Intermingled ownership of the conservation easement lands with DNRC and USFS will also retain opportunity for cross boundary forest planning and management.

Forest Stewardship

DNRC's partnership with Montana State University Extension Forestry provided 5 Forest Stewardship Workshops to a total of 118 participants, resulting in 56 new Forest Stewardship Plans developed and 34 plans monitored for continued commitment to forest stewardship practices. This represents more than 25,000 forested acres in Montana. Over the past 30 years, 180 workshops have educated more than 4,000 participants on the principles of sustainable forest stewardship and management. Collectively, more than 2,000 plans have been written representing 622,000 acres of private forest lands in Montana.

Landowner Assistance

The DNRC provided technical assistance to 938 landowners and provided education to 322 individuals. This work was accomplished by DNRC service foresters, DNRC Forestry Assistance staff and through partnerships with the Montana Tree Farm Program, the Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation and numerous other federal, state and non-profit partners. Through targeted and effective landowner outreach, the DNRC Stewardship Program continues to increase landowner engagement and participation in technical, education and financial assistance programs.

Technical assistance to non-industrial private forest owners and more than 50 forest management plans were developed through partnerships with both the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the American Forest Foundation to qualify landowners to receive assistance through EQIP. This work was accomplished by DNRC service foresters.

Landscape Scale Restoration

The DNRC has seven active Landscape Scale Restoration projects accomplishing a variety of activities, including: erosion mitigation and post-wildfire restoration, improving forest health and increasing resiliency to wildfire, tree canopy establishment and related benefits in Montana's tribal communities, forest improvements and public education in a community forest and community protection through education and hazardous fuels reduction. These projects are administering \$1.8M of State & Private Forestry investments and leveraging an additional \$2.5M of match and non-match contributions to complete nearly 4,000 acres of treatment.

Urban and Community Forestry

The Urban & Community Forestry program accelerated in multiple areas for the calendar year.

- With the recent award of the Sustainable Urban Forest Resilience (SUFR) grant, three of Montana's larger communities will work towards bringing tree equity into their urban forest management strategies. The project involves growing trees locally for better acclimation and prioritizing the plantings in underserved and disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- The program partnered with Montana Urban & Community Forestry Association (MUCFA) to grant over

\$75,000 to communities identified as high risk from Emerald Ash Borer. This project successfully removed hundreds of ash trees and replaced them with more diverse tree species, tree for tree.

- Several new projects are underway in the Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, and Crow Nations. More tribal community work may develop in Flathead, Northern Cheyenne, Rocky Boy and Fort Peck in upcoming months. This work is funded through a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant.

- The Urban Forest-Wildland Urban Interface landcover analysis project is yielding new noteworthy findings. This unique partnership has bridged the Stewardship and UCF programs along with local partners in both wildland and municipal fields.

- The Montana Forest Action Plan is in full use and integrated throughout the program for prioritizing grants (i.e., a focus on resilience and ecosystem services), conducting statewide community inventory updates and examining additional data like canopy cover that could contribute towards overall urban forest management objectives.

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